

## **Fremont gets encouragement for plan to develop area around Warm Springs-South Fremont BART**

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Fremont officials received an encouraging report Wednesday from a national education and research group as the city moves toward transforming an area near the future Warm Springs-South Fremont BART station into a 21st century workplace.

Representatives from the Urban Land Institute said the city faces challenges but has "tremendous assets" from which to build.

"You've got such a great potential here, and the market is ready for it," said Victor Karen, chairman of the ULI advisory panel and principal of Citybuilding Enterprises in Boston. "The economy, in some areas, it's on the upswing. Development is all about timing."

The analysis is another step in the process as the city puts together the Warm Springs Community Plan, which is expected to be complete next spring.

ULI's panel spent this week analyzing the 850-acre Warm Springs/South Fremont area surrounding the Tesla factory, focusing on mixed-use, transit-oriented development and job centers.

The nonprofit group encouraged the city to "strike while the iron is hot," dividing the potential development into phases, beginning with 5,000 square feet of retail space just east of the BART station scheduled to open in 2015.

The panel believes the city should be flexible throughout the process, given the unpredictability of the market, but had many suggestions for the project, including construction of an "iconic bridge" at the BART station to give the area a signature identity. The pedestrian bridge would cross over the existing Union Pacific Railroad track and connect the BART station to property on the west side.

Among the panel's list of potential civic uses: a food emporium/farmer's market, innovation center, public art gallery and a hotel.

The panel concluded that the city's strengths include its climate, location and access to freeways and BART, and community demographics.

"Your residents speak 137 different languages. That's amazing," Karen said.

It also noted Fremont's "first-class" schools, its strong business sector and its abundance of underdeveloped land available for a business park, noting that it's more than any other city in the region.

When the nearly two-hour presentation ended, city officials liked what they heard.

"I think a lot of it we knew, but it's always nice to be reinforced, especially by a group like this," Councilman Bill Harrison said. "I think just having that outside set of eyes, verifying the possibilities of the jewel that Warm Springs is, is a tremendous asset for it."

The panel estimates that it will cost approximately \$55 million in improvements between now and 2020 to facilitate its vision for the land. The development is projected to create more than 13,000 jobs and 3,800 housing units.

Asked about financing for the plan, Karen said, "Basically it would be some kind of city bonding against the future stream of revenues. That essentially is the concept."

Harrison is ready to move forward.

"We need to get started yesterday," he said. "The city has been working on this for several years."